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ABSTRACT

Auditory imagination is used in this paper to describe a number of issues and activities related to sound and having to do with listening, thinking, recalling, imagining, reshaping, creating, and uttering sounds and words. Examples of auditory imagination in religious and literary works are cited that indicate a belief in an imagined, expected, or hidden world of sound that lies outside the natural or human-made sounds. A discussion of four specific issues as areas within the total domain of auditory imagination is presented to add to the understanding and appreciation of the whole. The four issues discussed are: the principle of the relationship between naming and bringing into being, the extent to which sound and oral language skills attained a degree of perfection in the ancient Greek civilization, examples of auditory imagination in the works of Shakespeare, and sound impression and oral language experiences of children as they relate to the development of auditory imagination. (MKM)

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AUDITORY IMAGINATION

A Special Paper
by
Martyn Croft

For the 1979 Armidale/New England Conference on

DEVELOPING ORAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN CHILDREN

This paper relates closely to the Lecture/Recital Programme, Auditory Imagination which I shall be presenting at the Conference with the assistance of students and graduates of the Specialist English, Speech and Drama Course of the T.C.A.E., Launceston.

As far as I know, the term Auditory Imagination is of my own making, although it is possible that others have also used the expression, either to name and describe the issues I am concerned with or else for other purposes.

I have found it necessary to coin this term because I find myself concerned, in a particular way, with a number of issues and activities related to sound. Such issues have to do with listening, thinking, recalling, imagining, re-shaping, creating and uttering sounds and words in a particular way, for a particular purpose.

In this paper and later, in the Lecture/Recital programme at the Conference, I want to try to explain and describe some of the things I mean when I use the expression auditory imagination. Although the issues I shall be raising are broad and general in character and do not relate exclusively to Primary School Education, I am hoping, nevertheless, that my audience may, sooner or later, see very definite implications in respect of the teaching situation and that my offerings may help to give focus and momentum to our subsequent group discussions.

I must also mention that in the limited time and space available to me I cannot possibly offer a complete itemisation, thorough explanation and practical outworking, through demonstration, of each of the many possible component elements of auditory imagination, but I shall hope to scatter a sampling of some of the diverse forms, issues and implications associated with what I call auditory imagination.

In the first place, I want to suggest that in Education we are greatly in need of inspiration. It is true that careful observation, documentation and analysis of present levels of oral language competency are yielding results which may enable us to make recommendations in respect of necessary lesson objectives, syllabuses, support facilities and so forth. Such work, at some stage, is necessary if laudible principle is to be translated into effective classroom practice.

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I say, however, that we are in need of inspiration because while such work is necessary to enable us to cope, in a business like way, with present problems, we must have more than this. We need what I might call an 'auditory vision' if we are to be able to conceive of a society which honours, nurtures and practises those skills associated with listening, sound making and oral language (in all its forms). I suggest that conceiving of such a society requires imagination. Since such imagining is in respect of things to be heard in such a society (words, conversation, song, instruments, poetry, drama, stories and so forth) I call it auditory imagination.

Unless we can exercise auditory imagination to the extent that we can almost already hear effective, expressive oral communication at all levels and within all agencies of society as a whole, I suggest that our attempts to plan for provision in any one section alone, (be it Primary or Secondary) will lack the necessary relationship to the total possible scope. In practice, of course, this would mean a higher level of expectation in respect of oral communication between everyone. I'm thinking of the silent family at the meal table, the stumbling newscaster, the inaudible actor and so on. I believe, too, that it is only the granting of a vision, and, in our case, through auditory imagination, an 'auditory vision' which will call us into a sense of personal conviction and commitment to our cause.

The Old Testament states that where there is no vision the people perish. Elsewhere a writer speaks of lifting up his eyes to the hills from whence cometh his help. I want to suggest that perhaps we have the right to transpose those sentiments into the terminology of speaking and listening so that, in our case, we may say that we extend the range of our auditory response from the actual and immediate to the distant, the imagined and the ideal.

I believe that unless we occasionally experience such extension and elevation of our auditory 'sights', two most unfortunate things occur. First, we shall tend to lose our sense of direction, educationally and artistically speaking, because we are no longer picking up the guiding messages from the "transmitting tower" and, second, our individual and corporate association with the cause of oral language competency will eventually lack conviction, commitment, zeal and endurance because we shall lack the life-giving and renewing inspiration of communion with an ideal. Such an ideal is granted, I believe, through the ministry of the auditory imagination.

I am no historian, but it seems to me that the best example we have of a society which recognised, honoured and nurtured the skills of listening, sound composition and speaking was that of the ancient Greeks. The free man of Athens enjoyed an educational system which set great store by the memorisation of poetry and song, a political system in which debate flourished, a legal system which gave rise to the strategies of forensic oratory, social life in which conversation flowed and a religious and artistic life as evidenced in the great annual festivals of poetry and drama, where highly developed, flexible, wide-ranging powers of oral interpretation and delivery were necessary in order to match the scale and power of the language of the great tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.

In our own day, when the theatre tends to be regarded either as a home of the elite or the place for a good belly laugh, it is perhaps difficult for us, in poring over the ancient texts, to exercise the

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necessary powers of auditory imagination to catch again, short-circuiting the centuries, the glory of the combined sounds of music and heightened utterance, solo speaker and chorus.

If I speak of "ideals" or "inspiration" or "auditory visions" as being necessary to our sense of direction and our gaining of refreshment and momentum for our work, surely we must admit that the 'sound circumstances' of that ancient civilization, and particularly of those dramatic performances, provides an outstanding example of a society which attained an extraordinarily close proximity to the ideals of which I am speaking.

I believe that, in some intuitive, almost mystical sense, the great dramatists themselves managed to exercise a special kind of auditory imagination. Partially as a result of trial and error, but partly too as a result of some heightened auditory awareness they conceived, in their minds' ears, an overall structuring of their material so as to distribute it in a sound pattern which fitted, and struck a chord of recognition in, the auditory sensibilities of the audiences for whom their compositions were destined. For example, put in a very simple and specific way, we may readily appreciate the fact that an audience, even a highly motivated one, needs variety of listening experience if it is to remain alert and interested. It may have been a happy accident that Thespis detached himself from the chorus as the first solo actor. Certainly we should also have to agree that in so doing he facilitated the treatment of dramatic action. But we should not forget that the plays were really poems cast in a dramatic form. These poems were firmly rooted in an oral tradition and, in performance, they were accompanied by musical instruments of various kinds. I mention these matters because I want to emphasise the central and fundamental fact of their sound sense in addition to their literal and literary sense. Therefore, as far as Thespis was concerned, his detachment from the chorus meant not only that dramatic action was easier to depict, but also that, in composition of the dramatic poems, the writer could use his auditory imagination to better advantage in devising sections for a block or 'barrage' of chorus sound, and then contrast this with the sound of solo lines for either chorus-leader or solo actor. This variation in sound is pleasing to an audience; it provides a change of "sound texture" or sound experience. It is, I suggest, only one of a variety of ways in which the great tragedians used auditory imagination in the composition of their works so as to provide variation, contrast, sequencing and patterning of sound. In addition, I suggest that this patterning of sound was more than an arbitrary matter, more even than simply a matter of convention. The alternation of stasimon and episode, the contrasting of cross-fire stichomythia with massive choral ode, and so forth, was finely attuned to, and deliberately matched with, an imagined audience's auditory sensibilites, needs and limitations.

In ancient Greece, by tradition, the scope of the poet/dramatist and that of the musician were hardly to be distinguished. What richness, eloquence, range and power a poet/dramatist/musician's sensitivity to pitch, tone, cadence, volume, phrasing, rhythm and melody must have brought to poetic and dramatic composition! What mighty rivers of auditory awareness and skill were flowing into the great tidal ocean of auditory imagination and inventiveness. What an inspiration it must have been to the poet to weave, fold, shake, swirl and stretch to its outer limits, the gorgeous cloth of oral language in a society where oracy was prized highly enough to ensure, through its education system, intelligent, audible, distinct and expressive utterance from chorus and individual actor alike, and where, in addition, the finer nuances of oral interpr-tation would be sought, observed, appreciated and acclaimed by an audience whose outer and inner ears were fined attuned to the properties of oral language and poetic diction.

Ancient Athenian society freely recognised the art and influence of the poet/dramatist as being of the greatest importance in the education and life of the free man of that city and of the morale and well being of the city as a whole. So important was attendance at the annual dithyrambic and dramatic festivals considered to be that if any man could not afford to attend, he might avail himself of a state subsidy, so as not to be deprived of the ministry of words, song, dance and spectacle.

In Aristophanes' play "The Frogs" a debate takes place between Aeschylus and Euripides. A question of great profundity and enormous potential interest, to an educated Athenian audience, is raised:

Aeschylus "What is the chief duty of the tragic poet?"

To this Euripides replies:

Euripides "To speak truth for the good of the city."

This 'true speaking' implies, I believe, more than upholding of the traditional Greek moral and religious values. It had also to do with the fashioning of poetic language destined for oral communication in dramatic form and which, in its sound structures, rhythms, harmonies, and so forth, spoke unmistakably to the Greek auditory susceptibilities and imagination of clarity, intelligence, heightened experience and love of order and proportion. The same oral language qualities were considered by Plato and others as being capable, in and of themselves, of radically influencing the moral conduct and behaviour of a people.

Many others, since the time of the Greeks, have similarly realised the strong influence of the poet and the musician upon the state.

If it is true that our own inner ears of auditory perception and imagination may catch, through time, reverberations of the glorious sound evidences of the ancient Greek civilization, what then of other realms and other times? If we call into play the full resources of our auditory receptivities, our imaginations and our knowledge of sound and utterance, I wonder how far distant a scanning of the kingdom of sound can take us?

The Judao-Christian faith asserts, in Genesis Chapter One, the fundamental principal of the linking of the act of speaking with that of bringing into being. Here utterance and existence are one, since energy, matter and life are ushered into existence through divine utterance.

> And God said
> Let there be light
> And there was light
> And God said
> Let there be a firmament in
> the midst of the waters...
> ...And it was so.

As, when and because the Almighty uttered it, so it was, according to Hebrew teaching, that the phenomena of creation came into being.

Perhaps this notion of linking utterance with creation is echoed also in the Aboriginal myth of the birth of the sun, since it is there the morning cry of the kookaburra which summons the sky people to light the morning sun and release the earthlings from the bonds of darkness.

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In the Hebrew scriptures, the identification of the phenomena of creation, through naming, seems also, in Genesis One, to be established as a basic fact and principle.

> And God called the light
> Day.
> And the darkness He called
> Night.

In Chapter Two God confers, upon His created one, Adam, the divine authority to bestow name and identity:

> And out of the ground the Lord God formed
> every living beast of the field, and every
> fowl of the air' and brought them unto Adam
> to see what he would call them:
>
> and whatsoever Adam called every living
> creature, that was the name thereof.

It would seem, according to Psalm 19, that not only the divine acts of bringing into being and those of man's naming of creation are inextricably linked with utterance, but also, in some profound and mystical sense, that each of the objects of creation proclaims and makes manifest its existence through utterance (whether heard and heeded, by man, or not).

> The heavens declare the glory of God; and
> the firmament showeth His handiwork.
>
> Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto
> night showeth knowledge.
>
> There is no speech nor language where their
> voice is not heard.
>
> Their line is gone out through all the earth,
> and their words to the end of the world.

Concerning the matter of auditory imagination, it seems of significance to me that A.B. Rhodes (The Layman's Bible Commentary) while seeking to expound, elucidate and apply to human experience this portion of Psalm 19, still relies heavily on words to do with sound and hearing.

> "The heavenly anthem is unheard by the outer
> ear, but what marvellous harmony it brings to
> the inner ear. From the beginning of creation
> the choirs of day and night, in antiphonal
> fashion have proclaimed the glory of their
> creator ... such proclamation is worldwide."

Certainly the medieval scholars believed in a "hidden" world of sound which lay outside the natural or man-made sounds of this world.

Music was a 'speculum' or mirror of the universal order. First and highest in this order was Musica Munda or Music of the Universe: what Milton later referred to as Music of the Spheres. Perhaps it was in respect of not only doctrine, but also of the timeless language of creation, that Christ himself who, incidentally, is referred to in St

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John's gospel as "the Word", said:

> He that hath ears to hear,
> let him hear.

Certainly it is possible for there to be actual sound, both natural and man-made, without this being heard or heeded in any deep or significant sense.

> It is like unto children sitting in the
> markets, and calling unto their fellows
>
> And saying, We have piped unto you, and
> ye have not danced! we have mourned unto
> you and ye have not lamented.

The Duke, in Shakespeare's 'As You Like It', discovers, in his Forest of Arden exile, some ground for comfort:

> ...(And) this our life, exempt from
> public haunt, finds tongues in trees,
> books in the running brooks, sermons
> in stones and good in everything.

So too does Caliban,in his auditory imaginings, in Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'.

> Be not afeard, the isle is full of noises,
> Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and
> hurt not:
> Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
> Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,
> That if I then had wak'd after long sleep,
> Will make me sleep again, and then, in dreaming,
> The clouds methought would open, and show riches
> Ready to drop upon me, that, when I waked
> I cried to dream again.

Auditory imagination seems here to be at work in many ways. First, in the sense of Shakespeare himself having conceived of an order of otherworldly sounds - "noises", "sweet airs", "twangling instruments", "voices" pervading "the isle". Second, in the sense of these words, with their sound sense (onomatopoeia, rhythm phrasing, and assonance) combined with their associations and literal meanings, providing a kind of score for the performer who, in turn, must respond with sensitivity and exercise heightened auditory imagination in order to discover how best to transpose the auditory cues into oral language and even movement patters which will be evocative, in character, and intelligible to an audience.

For a recent production of 'The Tempest' we composed our own sound sequences to accompany sections of the performance and in this instance too the inspiration for musical composition came to our auditory imaginations via the dynamics of Shakespeare's text.

Shakespeare knew well the limitations of the theatre of his day in bringing before an audience all the paraphernalia of every day existence. Surely Shakespeare and other great dramatists of his period, like the ancient Greeks before them, knew the power of words, the scope of auditory imagination the the vastly superior potential of eloquent oral delivery to body forth "such stuff as dreams are made on". In common

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with all great writers of the oral tradition, he demonstrates a keen awareness of the range and compass of human utterance. This full and intimate knowledge of the capabilities, idiosyncracies and limitations of the human voice, speech and delivery is an ever-present factor in his composition and it enables him to exercise what again I call auditory imagination, in devising diversity and aptness of sound,sequence, and structure of expression, in full synchronisation with sense.

In King Henry V, his chorus cries out not for real and actual horses, ships, robes, soldiers or "the vasty fields of France", but rather for:

> ... a Muse of fire, that would ascend
> The brightest heaven of invention.

Recognising the need to alert and rouse his audience to the active role of response and auditory imagination they must play in the proceedings, he continues:

> ... Let us, ciphers to this great accompt,
> on your imaginary forces work.

Again, later:

> Play with your fancies; and in them behold
> Upon the hempen tackle ship-boys climbing
> Hear the shrill whistle, which doth order give
> to sounds confus'd ...

And later still, in Act four, note his consummate skills of selection and orchestration in conjuring a "sound montage" suggestive and expressive of noctural preparation and anticipation.

> Now entertain conjecture of a time
> When creeping murmur and the poring dark
> Fills the wide vessel of the universe.
> From camp to camp, through the foul womb
> of night
> The hum of either army stilly sounds;
> That the fix'd sentinels almost receive
> The secret whispers of each other's watch.
> Fire answers fire, and through their paly flames
> Each battle sees the other's umber'd face;
> Steed threatens steed, in high and boastful neighs
> Piercing the night's dulled ear; and from the
> tents
> The armourers, accomplishing the knights,
> With busy hammers closing rivets up,
> Give dreadful note of preparation.

This process, of sifting, selection, rejection and patterning, is, of course, of the greatest importance to the composer, dramatist, artist and performer. James McNeill Whistler writing of 'Nature and Art' states:

> Nature contains the elements, in colour and form,
> of all pictures, as the keyboard contains the
> notes of all music.

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> But the artist is born to pick and choose, and group with science, these elements, that the result may be beautiful - as the musician gathers his notes and forms his chords until, he bring forth from chaos glorious harmony.
>
> To say to the painter, that Nature is to be taken as she is, is to say to the player, that he may sit on the piano...

Whether the artist works with musical notes or with words for speaking a crucial factor, in either case, is their setting, in time, and in relation to silence. I am convinced that one of the key elements in the auditory experience and imagination is that of silence, therefore, perhaps simply the absence of clamour and the restoration of ear and mind from its ravages is not enough. It may be that we should be more fully aware than we usually are of silence as an active and eloquent element in the chemistry of oral inter-play and auditory imagination. After all, oral interpretation and communication are set against the 'backdrop' of silence in much the same ways as the dancer's movements attain significance in relation to the existence and use of three dimension space. Similarly, the painter works not only in terms of pigments, tones and hues, but also in relation to the spatial silence of his canvas.

For the marriage partner, the parent, the teacher, the counsellor, employer or trade union official, the practical lesson, in respect of silence, is surely that we must listen for what is left unsaid, in sometimes awkward hesitances and painful gaps. We may need to 'hear between the words' as well as to 'read between the lines'.

There is fortunately, as with life itself, always the possibility of exploring an issue and reacting to it so as to make much of the humour if not the absurdity of the situation. So it is with the intermittent, momentary silences, indicated by trailing dots, in the script of one section from N.F. Simpsons' 'A Resounding Tinkle', this particular section is one in which we actually hear only one side of a telephone conversation and our auditory imagination has to invent the missing part of the dialogue.

What now of children and of the specifics of education experience? Is heredity all? Is auditory imagination entirely a matter of genes, of natural endowment and of intellect, or are there identifiable ways in which the auditory imagination may be nourished and nurtured, or even silenced?

I believe that most, if not all, of the early childhood experiences we now recognise as vital to general language acquisition, that is, personal and projected play, music, story telling, rhymes, jingles, lullabyes, games, riddles, conversation, creative art work and socialisation, are all germane and generative to the development of the auditory imagination.

It occurs to me however, that even though many pay lip service to the theory of early childhood language acquisition, there is still, generally speaking, a huge gap between theory and practice and between knowledge and understanding.

In all probability one of the first sounds the new-born baby hears is that of his own crying!

Other noises may soon be added to his repertoire of personal sound language; those of

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breathing
sucking
burping
chortling
'crooning'
tapping
sneezing
banging
coughing
and hiccupping

Assuming natural hearing abilities, a range of external sounds soon dawns upon his auditory awareness.

Sound of Mother's Voice
" " Nurse's Voice
" " Doctor's Voice
" " Father's Voice
" " Whistling Kettle
" " T.V. Programme (News/Weather/ Western)
" " Baby's Rattle
" " Vacuum Cleaner
" " Telephone

For the new-born babe it is surely reasonable to assume that the sound signals picked up by his sound monitoring system register first upon his auditory sensibilities in terms of such qualities as:

volume
pitch
tone
cadence
sustained or explosive sounds
isolated, intermittent or regularly repeated sounds
duration
and emphasis patterns

What powers of auditory imagination we must exercise in our attempts to understand the baby's earliest responses to sound. How can we possibly untie, in our thoughts, the connecting threads of association which run, in our adult minds, between the sound of a whistling electric kettle and notions of:

Hot Water
Steam rising
Dangers of scalding
Sterilization
Tea pots
Instant coffee
Power points

Not to mention the dangers of a burnt out element!

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Does the actual sound, in and of itself, suggest, in the baby's auditory apparatus, urgency, or is that only later communicated, as a result of parental dives for the off switch? I believe that it may well register in the baby's mechanism as urgency in view of the Whistling Kettle's high pitch, volume and continuity of sound.

Let us hope that a sense of security,well being, order and peace prevail in the home and, particularly, that those qualities and conditions surround the babe, so that there may be time, opportunity and encouragement for the sounds themselves to set their individual seals of imprint with clarity, detail and significance in his auditory memory. Let us also hope that the same propitious circumstances may enable him to forge the links of understanding and association between the sound and its significance.

If we stop to consider carefully many of the Nursery Rhymes we share with very young children, it becomes evident that meaning is often supported by physical contact or sensation and also by heightened and, sometimes, emphatic qualities of oral delivery.

Many, if not all, of the elements of sophisticated poetry and oral language usage are also observable in these rhymes. In 'This Little Piggy' for example, the distinct changes of pitch are essential not only to support the sense, to mark the transition from one creature to the next, to produce a sense of order, sequence and pattern, but, above all, in order to delight the auditory imagination of the listener. Similarly other Nursery Rhymes evidence examples of basic poetic expression which find their counterparts in later and adult poetry.

Am I, I wonder, altogether too fanciful in suggesting that there are patterning relationships in common berween 'This Little Piggy' and, for example, the consciously structured dialogue between Portia and Nerissa in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night?

Quite a difference spirit prevails in 'Ride a Cock Horse'.

Isn't it reasonable to suppose that the child who has been jogged and bounced, on a parent's knee, to the bold, insistant rhythmic drive and 'attack' of this rhyme may respond with auditory recognition and delight to Robert Browning's 'How They Brought the Good News from Ghen to Aix'?

Who is to say whether certain phrases from Nursery Rhymes have any actual, literal meaning at all? It may be that home phrases, like the traditional ballads, have come into being, endured and been handed on because of their aptness.

Such phrases 'fit the mouth', they constitute an appealing challenge to our articulatory capabilities and their shape, spirit and over-all dynamics delight the auditory imagination of the listener.

Again, we may speculate regarding the possible lines of Nursery Rhyme progression and development, leading to the nonsense niceties of Lewis Carroll's'Jabberwocky'.

And then, in addition, if we are fortunate, we experience, during our growing up, occasions when sounds, either singly, in pairs, or in clusters and sequences, impress themselves upon our consciousness and, seemingly upon our sub-consciousness too. The latter part of Dylan Thomas' recollection of 'A Child's Christmas in Wales' testifies to this fact and,

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in turn, draws forth, from our own memory banks of auditory impressions and imagination, answering chords of recognition.

In my attempt to establish some of the scope of what I mean by auditory imagination I have tried to suggest its enormous potential scope through usggestion that only by means of it may we gain access to and understand the significance of:

(i) The elemental principle of the relationships between utterance and bringing into being (creation) and the declaration of the nature and existence of such created things through their emission of a sound language.

(ii) The evidences of, and the extent to which, sound and oral language skills attained a degree of perfection in an ancient civilization (The Greek).

(iii) The work of a great oral poet/dramatist such as Shakespeare and its implications in respect of writer, speaker and audience.

(iv) Sound impressions and oral language experiences in the early life of children and subsequently.

The four specific issues I have treated I regard simply as areas within the total domain of auditory imagination. I hope that sharing of the Lecture/Recital programme, at the conference itself, reflection and discussion may add to our understanding and appreciation of the whole. It is also my hope that we may eventually come to conveive of listening, sound-making (including music) and use of oral language in more inter-related ways within the total context of auditory imagination.